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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000486

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF JUSTICE WOULD WELCOME USG HELP IN
COMBATING SLAVERY

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 312

[¶](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 431

Classified By: Ambassador Mark Boulware for reasons 1.4 (c) and (d)

[¶1.](#) Summary: The Ministry of Justice has been informed of Mauritania's reclassification to Tier 3 in the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report and has been briefed about the process and potential consequences for future USG-Government of Mauritania engagement. Dr. Haimoud Ould Ramadhane, Advisor to the Ministry of Justice, reassured PolOff of the government's commitment to fighting slavery and hoped the USG would help the Ministry with the implementation of any USG-proposed Action Plan to bring Mauritania back to Tier 2. He highlighted the government's latest efforts against poverty that target former slave populations and recognized that despite a solid legal framework, the government had failed at implementation of the anti-slavery law. He cited the disconnect and mistrust between the government and civil society as one of the causes for program failures. Ramadhane stated the USG can help by assisting Mauritania in standing up an anti-slavery brigade to investigate slavery cases in urban and rural areas. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) PolOff met on July 21 with Dr. Haimoud Ould Ramadhane, Advisor to the Ministry of Justice, to discuss Mauritania's reclassification to Tier 3 in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report and underscore how important trafficking issues, particularly slavery, would be for the USG moving forward. Ramadhane stated he was already aware of Mauritania's reclassification and pointed out that the USG, despite its so-called interest in eradicating slavery, "had never given a single penny to the Ministry to help with anti-slavery programs since 2005." He stated he hoped the USG would help the Ministry in the application of any USG-proposed Action Plan to bring Mauritania back to Tier 2. Note: Ramadhane, a descendant of slaves, is the author of the Law on the Exploitation of Individuals, the Children's Code and participated in the drafting of the Law Against Slavery. End Note.

ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS TARGET "DESCENDANTS OF SLAVES"

[¶3.](#) (C) Ramadhane, who uses the euphemisms "les sequelles de l'esclavage" (the aftermath of slavery) or "les pratiques esclavagistes" (slavery-related practices) but did not once refer to "slavery" as slavery, stated that it was not in the Government of Mauritania's best interest to perpetuate "slavery-related practices". He stressed these "practices" have always existed in Mauritania and are of a complex nature, as many former slaves have strong family or social connections to their masters.

[¶4.](#) (C) Ramadhane underlined the government had instituted

programs to help poor populations, which included "the descendants of slaves." He referred PolOff to a program launched four months ago by the Human Rights Commissioner in conjunction with civil society to fight poverty in the Triangle of Poverty. This modest program (funded at less than \$5,000) aims to improve education, health, employment, and training opportunities for underprivileged populations constituted, for the most part, of "former slaves" disadvantaged by their social condition. He also highlighted the Food Security program, which he claims mostly targets the "former slave" population, allowing them to live independently. He also mentioned the Bamako initiative which brings health care and affordable medicines to poor populations and the Strategic Framework for the Fight Against Poverty. Finally, Ramadhane stressed there were laws in Mauritania that indirectly fought against child slavery such as the mandatory education law for children between 6-14 years of age. Comment: PolOff has seen no indication that this law is universally enforced. End comment.

GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY DISCONNECT

¶5. (C) For Ramadhane, the necessary legal framework is already in place but the government has failed at enforcement. He said one of the main obstacles to easing the "aftermath of slavery" has been the inability of the government and civil society to work together. He stressed there is deep mistrust between the government and civil society as civil society has traditionally labeled the State

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as "pro-slavery" and the government perceives civil society as a threat whose sole objective is to demonstrate the government is not acting in good faith. Ramadhane brought home the point that government and civil society need to overcome their prejudices and disagreements and work together to ensure programs are successful and laws are respected. He encouraged the USG to use its influence with civil society to persuade them to support and participate in government programs.

¶6. (C) PolOff commented that the recent cases of suspected child-slaves Hana Mint Maria and Vatimetou Mint Mata Moulana were of concern as they showed an unwillingness to prosecute slave-masters on slavery grounds but also on child abuse and endangerment (Ref A and B). Ramadhane stated he was not aware of these cases and that neither Fatimata M'Baye, a lawyer focused in children's rights with Terre des Hommes, nor Boubacar Messaoud with SOS Esclaves had come to see him regarding them. He stated that if judges had dismissed accusations, civil society still had legal recourses, particularly if the charges were related to child abuse, forced child labor, failure to comply with the mandatory education law, and child molestation.

A FEW IDEAS FOR THE USG

¶7. (C) Ramadhane suggested the USG could assist Mauritania in standing up an "anti-slavery brigade." The brigade would consist of policemen and gendarmes dedicated to investigating slavery cases and gathering solid evidence for prosecution. The brigade's policemen would fight against urban slavery whereas the gendarmes would work in rural areas. He suggested a camel brigade would be most appropriate for faraway areas. Ramadhane argued that such a brigade would confirm the State's determination to fight against slavery-related practices; it would become a deterrent for people who enslaved others; and finally it would reassure victims that the government was looking after them.

¶8. (C) He also invited the USG to contribute to awareness

campaigns and said it would be beneficial for Mauritanian Ministry of Justice experts to conduct a study-trip to Niger to gather lessons learned from their counterparts.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) WIth Mauritania's decline into Tier III TIP status, credible anti-slavery activities on the part of the newly-elected government will be key in allowing other areas of U.S.-Mauritanian cooperation to re-engage. The Mission will highlight TIP priorities and possible programmatic responses following ou Country Team MSP review planned for next week. End comment.

BOULWARE